

**Some go down, some go up—**

After major banks reduced their prime interest rate from  $5\frac{3}{4}\%$  to  $6\frac{1}{2}\%$ , the Federal Reserve Board last week cut the discount rate charged most member banks from  $5\frac{1}{2}\%$  to  $5\frac{1}{4}\%$ , the lowest since 1968. But following a different trend, the national unemployment rate rose to 6% in December, the highest since 1961, and construction's seasonally adjusted rate of unemployment climbed to 11%, compared with 9.1% in November.

**Phased solution to ear pollution—**

New York City officials are putting the finishing touches on the nation's first comprehensive noise pollution code aimed at setting enforceable decibel ceilings for all major forms of urban din. Key targets in the draft, due before the city council next month, will be vehicle noise and noise from an estimated 100,000 street repair and construction jobs a year. Robert S. Bennin, noise abatement bureau chief, says the code will allow gradual replacement of machinery that exceeds the limits.

**Better luck this time—**

Chicago's new McCormick Place, the \$105-million replacement for the one destroyed by fire in January, 1967, opened last week, one year behind schedule and \$33 million more expensive than estimated. The exposition hall's big event this week is the housewares show, the same show that was on when fire hit the old \$35-million McCormick Place.

**Steelmaker feeds inflation—**

Bethlehem Steel Corp. announced steep 10 to 12% price increases for some major construction steel products last

Monday. The increases, which more than double last year's modest 5% hikes, take effect Feb. 16 for steel pilings and Mar. 1 for H-piles, standard structural shapes, and carbon plates. Furthermore, the large steelmaker removed price guarantees that had covered these products.

**Building systems go to war—**

Israeli intelligence sources report that Soviet engineers are using a building system to install within hours, SAM-2 ground-to-air missile bases on the Egyptian side of the Suez Canal. A base consists of a circular concrete platform up to 300 yd in diameter, all prefabricated. Six concrete structures that form a hexagon house the launchers and a seventh one houses the command post. The units are prefabricated at distant points and trucked to the sites, the sources report.

**Independent union favored—**

San Francisco area engineers in both the public and private sectors responded with unexpected unanimity to a recent Western Council of Engineers poll querying them on their preference for representation at the bargaining table (ENR 11/12/70 p.3). Of the 900 who answered the survey, 82% favor an independent engineer's bargaining group over an AFL-CIO-type trade union.

**Turning off the heat—**

The California Water Resources Control Board gave final approval to new thermal discharge standards banning new discharges that will raise the temperature of rivers, bays or coastal waters by more than 20 F. The regulation is effective immediately.

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**CONTENTS**

*For Construction Costs*

**News**

- 11 Washington observer
- 13 Nixon shuns confrontation with labor
- 14 Cracked columns halt post-tensioned garage work
- 15 A-Es take a hard look at new federal rules
- 15 New law will give new towns a big, new lift
- 16 Diverse groups brewing shake-up of nation's codes
- 18 Saving Capitol will save capital, report says
- 18 Thames River flood barrier gets go-ahead
- 18 Study finds California water program outpaced needs
- 19 Ohio starts oval test track at highway research center
- 19 Private companies to build more French expressways
- 19 Blocks laid on plastic to halt road erosion
- 19 Airport construction lights developers' fires
- 21 First Hong Kong tunnel section sunk after mishap
- 22 Seek to cool controversy over radiation standards

**Features**

- 24 Cables, epoxy hold stadium together (cover story)
- 28 Combine function, art on Eider Dam tainter gates
- 30 Big gear mucks bores through mini shaft
- 35 Coulee cofferdam cells rest on concrete base block

**Management and labor**

- 65 Question legality of minority consulting requirement

- 65 Large project tests project manager approach
- 65 Equipment maker wage pacts to mirror earlier pacts
- 68 December bids lag, but 1970 sets new record
- 68 Changes in payment practices recommended
- 68 Hint drastic changes needed in union hiring halls

**Products**

- 37 Rubber wedges used to stabilize rail crossing
- 37 Concrete cells help to rebuild eroding beach

**Departments**

- |                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 5 To fill you in    | 45 Pulse            |
| 7 Reader comment    | 52 Materials prices |
| 22 Around the world | 62 Unit prices      |
| 37 Product briefs   | 63 Legal            |
| 44 Scoreboard       | 80 Editorials       |

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